How Safe Communities Can Assist
Military Mission Readiness

The safety of safecomm members on the roadways when on duty or off duty is vital to mission readiness. All service branches now must do more with limited human and financial resources. Improving highway safety and preventing deaths and injuries is one sure way to contribute to mission readiness.

The Safe Communities approach to injury prevention offers safecomm installations a proven way to harness resources and improve safety. It enables safecomm installations to draw on community expertise and support to save lives.

This folio aims:

► To inform safecomm personnel how Safe Communities works.

► To explain how safecomm personnel can form coalitions and become involved in their local communities.

What is Safe Communities?

Safe Communities is a model to target trafficrelated injuries and deaths among a community's health hazards. For the safecomm, "community" can refer to:

► An individual installation.

► The safecomm installation and its local community.

Safe Communities began in the United States in 1996 with a handful of sites. By late 2002, more than 1,000 Safe Communities sites existed across the nation, including some safecomm installations. The approach requires:

► Analysis of several data sources.

► Extended partnerships with persons outside the traditional traffic safety community.

► Citizen involvement and input.

► Integrated, complete injury control combining prevention, acute care, and

rehabilitation.

This approach in injury prevention grew out of a need by communities to tackle injuries with coordinated prevention, acute care, and rehabilitation efforts. It starts with an interdisciplinary coalition of citizens who first document injury frequency and causes. An analysis of local data then enables the coalition to design interventions and measures to address the causes.

The Safe Communities approach has reduced injuries in communities, despite size, wealth, geographic location, or demographic mix. It can help safecomm installations with injury prevention by involving the entire community to:

- Identify problems.

- Find solutions.

Traffic Safety and Mission Readiness

Motor vehicle crashes affect the prepared-ness of America's troops to answer when duty calls:

- Motor vehicle crashes (not training accidents or combat) are the leading cause of death and serious injury for all safecomm personnel.

- The motor vehicle fatality rate for safecomm members is now the highest in four years.

Because of traffic safety's impact on mission readiness, in 1999 the Department of Defense (DOD) launched a servicewide effort to improve highway safety. The DOD issued Instruction 6055.4 setting guidelines for a sweeping highway safety policy and programs. The Instruction governs personnel in all safecomm branches, civilian and active duty, and anyone while on a safecomm base. Though not specifically mentioned in the Instruction, safecomm hospitals, like their civilian counterparts, also engage in traffic injury prevention because they treat motor vehicle crash victims.

Despite the DOD Instruction's priority on highway safety, resources for such activities are lean. The central Safety Centers in each service branch have, at most, one or two people in charge; often highway safety is one of many responsibilities. Most individual safecomm bases are in the same situation. Fortunately, the DOD Instruction directed safecomm installations to work with community leaders and existing grassroots organizations to plan and conduct local education efforts.

safecomm bases can:

- Join an existing Safe Communities coalition serving their local community.

- Start their own Safe Communities coalition to gain support from various base commands and draw in base police, fire department, hospitals, schools, and safety offices.

Special Safecomm Needs

safecomm personnel may face increased traffic safety risks, including:

▶ Large population in a high-risk driver category (males between the ages of 18 and 34).

▶ Large variation in driving-skill levels among troops (many new Army recruits may lack driver's licenses).

▶ Many installations are in rural areas with two-lane roads.

▶ Personnel also are new to their assignment and unfamiliar with local roads and laws.

▶ Large personnel turnover, so several drivers always need training.

▶ Driving skills get "rusty" when personnel have been at sea or otherwise deployed for long periods.

▶ Personnel often travel long distances to be with family when on leave or during the holidays, lending to fatigue and long drives on unfamiliar roads.

Why Work with the Local Community?

safecomm installations should consider working with the surrounding community to prevent traffic injuries and deaths because:

▶ Motor vehicle crashes account for most off duty unintentional injury deaths.

▶ Most off-duty crashes occur off base and involve privately owned vehicles.

▶ Most fatalities occur on weekends and late at night or early morning.

While some safecomm personnel and their families live on base, even more live elsewhere. They and the base's civilian employees use local roadways for commuting. And everyone drives the public roads during off-duty hours. safecomm drivers and their dependents encounter the same traffic hazards as anyone else, perhaps more. One Army study found that the safecomm driver was at fault in 77 percent of crashes involving personally owned vehicles.

Individuals on the front lines of safecomm injury prevention agree:

▶ "We're part of the community, not our own entity," said Tom Lewis, Safety Director, Bolling Air Force Base. He added,

▶ "We in the safecomm use local highways, so we have to train our people how to use them safely."

▶ "What happens on base affects the community and what happens in the

community affects the base," said Dan Phillips, Chief Master-at-Arms, Navy Region Northwest.

► "We are the community even though we're the Navy," said John Spencer, Chief of Police at Naval Submarine Base Bangor, in Washington. He added, "To not get involved and use the resources they can provide would be a terrible mistake."

Working with the local Safe Communities coalition also yields good community relations for an installation. The Navy's Chief Phillips noted, "There's been a perception among some that the safecomm offender gets punished less harshly for Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) than civilians." Joining forces with civilian authorities can calm the notion.

It makes sense for safecomm and civilian safety professionals and advocates to work together because they:

► Face the same issues.

► Perform the same tasks.

► Use the same educational/awareness/ prevention tools.

They can:

► Learn from each other.

► Share costs.

► Avoid duplication.

► Present a united front to the entire community.

Cooperating with the community on injury prevention can ease a safecomm safety officer's job and reduce traffic-related injuries and deaths among safecomm personnel.

Case Study in Cooperation

Here is how one Navy base working with the local community gained ideas and resources beyond those normally available through safecomm channels.

Kitsap County, WA, is home to Naval Submarine Base Bangor. In 1990, the county had the seventh worst record in the State for alcohol-related traffic fatalities, but by 1999 it was Washington's safest county. The decision of the county and the naval base to work together to fight DWI produced the turnaround. Their tactics:

► Mock DWI scenes were held on base with the local coroner, fire crews, emergency airlift, etc.

► The County obtained a grant to produce DWI awareness materials that

were distributed on base.

- The County sent safecomm personnel for training in crash investigation and DWI.

- Community personnel visited incoming ships at sea to brief sailors about Washington's traffic laws.

- The County DWI specialist gives regular presentations at orientation sessions for new personnel.

Get Involved with Your Local Coalition

If you are a safety professional or someone involved with traffic death and injury prevention, take the lead in getting your base involved in the local Safe Communities coalition. You may already know somebody who's involved. To learn more about the local coalition, talk with:

- Colleagues who live off base.

- Your civilian counterparts (e.g., police or fire personnel, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel, hospital emergency department personnel).

- Neighbors and parents at your child's school or a member of your religious congregation.

Learn when the next coalition meeting will be held, and attend it. The local coalition will be pleased to have you participate. Coalition members probably have wanted to approach the base about joining the coalition, but perhaps were uncertain where to begin.

The safecomm offers the coalition some valuable assets:

- Ability to present a united front on community safety issues.

- Safety resources, such as base police, fire department, hospital, and safety office, at your disposal.

- Knowledge of how to motivate people.

- Risk management orientation and methodology.

- Familiarity with a key atrisk population.

- young male drivers.

- Established communication channels to reach high-risk drivers.

Once you make the overture, you'll discover how productive a Safe Communities coalition can be.

Why Form a Safe Communities Coalition?

If a Safe Communities coalition does not already exist in your area or if you prefer to focus your energies solely on the base community's needs, form your own Safe Communities coalition. The coalition might include representatives of all potentially interested parties on the base: police, fire department, facilities management, schools, hospital, recreation center, auxiliary and the various commands stationed there. By forming a broad coalition to work for injury prevention, you:

- Increase the political/organizational support for the coalition because you have the involvement and resources of a broad crosssection of the base.

- Raise base awareness of safety services available.

- Create acceptance across the base, which eases execution and speeds adoption.

- Share the base's wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm on traffic safety issues.

- Learn how to motivate specific groups of people, rather than guess what will motivate them.

- Gain perspectives different from your own.

- Spur advocacy for more base resources for issues the group believes are vital.

Resources for Forming a Coalition

Tap several existing resources when starting a coalition at your installation. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) materials can help you get started. See NHTSA's web site, www.nhtsa.dot.gov/safecommunities, for:

- Background on Safe Communities.

- Examples of other coalition efforts.

- List of coalitions nationwide (Town Square Directory).

- Downloadable guides on how to form and maintain a Safe Communities Coalition.

- Links to the web site of other Safe Communities coalitions.

- Links to traffic safety and other safety organizations around the world.

- Links to web pages with program ideas, reports, data, evaluation techniques, and other resources.

A link to NHTSA's Regional offices can be found at: www.nhtsa.dot.gov

See NHTSA's Regional Offices web pages and partner links to the Governor's Highway Safety Representative in your State at: www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/whatis/regions/index.cfm?Fitting=No.

Check with the Safety Center for your safecomm branch to see if it has support materials or contacts at other bases that have successfully formed their own coalitions. See:

- Naval Safety Center, Motor Vehicle Division, in Norfolk, VA, at: www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/MotorVehicle/default.htm

- Marine Corps Safety Division, Occupational Health and Safety Branch, in Washington, D.C., at: www.hqmc.usmc.mil/safety.nsf

- Headquarters Air Force Safety Center, Ground Safety Operations, located at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, NM, at: http://safety.kirtland.af.mil/AFSC/RDBMS/Ground/ground.html

- Army Safety Center, Fort Rucker, AL, at: http://safety.army.mil/home.html

- Shore and Environmental Health Division, Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, DC, at: www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/g-wk/g-wks/g-wks-2/wks2.htm

How to Form a Coalition

After consulting with the available experts:

- Develop a strategy for getting needed chain of command approval.

- Identify key base stakeholders such as: police, fire, traffic engineer, hospital, personnel, public affairs, schools, day care center, youth center, library, civilian personnel, spouse groups, and interested parties from offbase.

- Invite stakeholders to an introductory meeting.

- Bring in experienced experts to testify to the effectiveness of Safe Communities, such as:

  - Representative from a nearby local Safe Communities coalition

  - Regional NHTSA representative or the Governor's Highway Safety Representative

  - Representative from a base that has already formed a coalition

Once a core group of key stakeholders has been assembled, hold a communitywide meeting. Invite all base community segments to participate and offer input.

The First Meeting

At the planning meeting, share facts on injury prevention and the effectiveness of the Safe Communities approach. Outside experts will add credibility to this discussion.

NHTSA's Safe Communities web site has marketing presentations you can download and use. Add data from your base's emergency response unit to capture a snapshot of the base's injury problem.

Let all points of view and perceptions of problems be heard. The ability to air grievances will draw the audience into the process, spark support, and possibly identify places where quick fixes can be made.

If enough interest exists to go forward, the next step is for the group to select a chairperson. Then it's up to the chair to set a date and agenda for the next meeting.

Act Now!

Adopting the Safe Communities approach to injury prevention yields many benefits. If your installation joins an existing coalition or forms a new one, harness the cooperation to improve traffic safety and enhance mission readiness.

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